

SMOKE SCREEN PROVED HANDY

Enabled Them to Dig Out
of Burning Building
and Escape.

CIVIL WAR VETERAN

Comrades Looked Upon Re-
turning Skirmishers as
Spirits of the Dead.

TANLEQUAH, Okla., June 19.—Weakened by the infirmities of age, Gee Dick, who is probably the oldest fullblood Indian citizen of Cherokee county, lies in a critical condition at his home out on Fourteen-mile creek. His end is apparently near at hand and his old friends never expect to see him out again. Dick, who from reliable accounts, was born about 1826 in the old Cherokee nation in Georgia, has lived in this section for many years. He was a widely known citizen of Tahlequah district long before statehood was thought of and since the admission of Oklahoma has continued to live in the old neighborhood where he built his home at a period when wild game abounded in the hills and woodlands and the political machinery of this nation was in full operation.

A participant in many stirring adventures, old Dick is the last of a large number of "old-time fullblood citizens," and one of the very few remaining veterans of the Cherokee regiments which followed the flag of the republic during the days of the civil war. In that long ago conflict there were 3,800 men of the Cherokee nation who wore the blue and fought on many of the battlefields of the southwest, but the number is now so reduced that even on occasions when efforts are put forth to have the aged veterans assembled, very few are to be seen. The first, second and third Cherokee regiments will soon exist only in memory and among the very last to survive is Gee Dick.

Perhaps the story the old man most often related concerning his experiences in the days of the "old war" is that pertaining to his hairbreadth escape a short distance from Fort Gibson. The post was occupied by white and Indian soldiers, the latter under supreme command of Col. W. A. Phillips. Dick, with other men, was sent out on some mission which took them far to the banks of the Bayou Menard, southeast of the military post. Quite soon a big force of confederates bore down upon them, but all escaped, with the exception of Dick and another man whose name has been lost. The two comrades found shelter in an abandoned log house and defied the confederates to take them. After spending some time seeking to induce the men in the house to come forth and be slain, the confederates succeeded in setting fire to the house, and soon it was blazing from top to bottom. With guns in hand, the confederates waited for their game, but when the two supposed victims were becoming very hot, with prospects of being roasted, the "wind became friendly" and blew the smoke close down to the ground in thick volume. Evidently a good spirit rode upon the wings of the breeze that morning, and Dick and his companion were quick to grasp the opportunity to escape so they set to work with their big knives digging beneath the sill. In a very short time, so fast did they work, they had a big hole opened.

They crawled out and keeping in the shadow of the smoke, made their way to a ravine into which they slid. After running for a long distance in the direction of the fort, they emerged and began to shout and ridicule the armed men surrounding the house. Indulging in the most insulting remarks and gestures, the erstwhile prisoners kept on their way. Already out of gunshot, and hearing the outposts of the fort, no effort was made to shoot or overtake them and soon they were safe behind the fortifications. They received great attention from their comrades, but soon experienced some peculiar actions on part of the more superstitious. It was noted that whereas both Dick and the other man had been seen to enter the house which was burned no one saw them make their escape. Seeing is believing seems to have been the maxim of the superstitious fellows, and it began to be circulated that Gee Dick and his comrade were actually burned to ashes in the house, and that beings who returned to the fort were spirits.

The companion of Gee Dick in the exciting episode of the burning house long ago returned to dust, but old Dick lived on year after year. There was nothing spirit-like about him. He was strong and rugged and for many years partook freely of firewater whenever he felt so inclined. He lived in a turbulent neighborhood and "held his own" with the roughest and toughest. His pistol or knife was usually carried and should the occasion arise for their use he was ready to take a hand at any time. The excitement of the ball game engaged his attention until such pastimes became obsolete among his people, but the "stomp dances" remained, and for many a year the leading dancer was none other than Gee Dick. Even when the weight of 90 years rested upon his shoulders, he often hitched an old pony to a buggy, played a feater in his hatband and drove away to the scene of festivities.

When the "sacred fire" was lighted near the tall pole in the center of the grounds the aged man began to evince interest which was augmented when the men and women entered and the dance began. Soon, when the beat of the tom-tom became insistent Gee Dick, with his countenance depicting great pleasure, would dance with an abandon not to be seen in the young and more agile. His whoops, loud and keen as in the wartime days, echoed far away down the valleys, and in the event the dance was prolonged to daybreak. He remained with the members of the younger generation. But the unseen specter which follows all men from the beginning of their lives has overtaken the old man and within a few days it is probable that he will cease to exist and be buried in the woodland near the "creek." If not in the United States national cemetery at Fort Gibson, where lie many hundreds of his comrades of the civil war.



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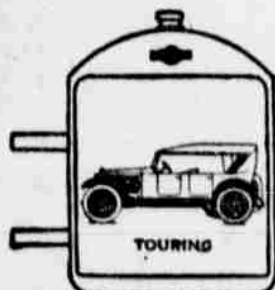
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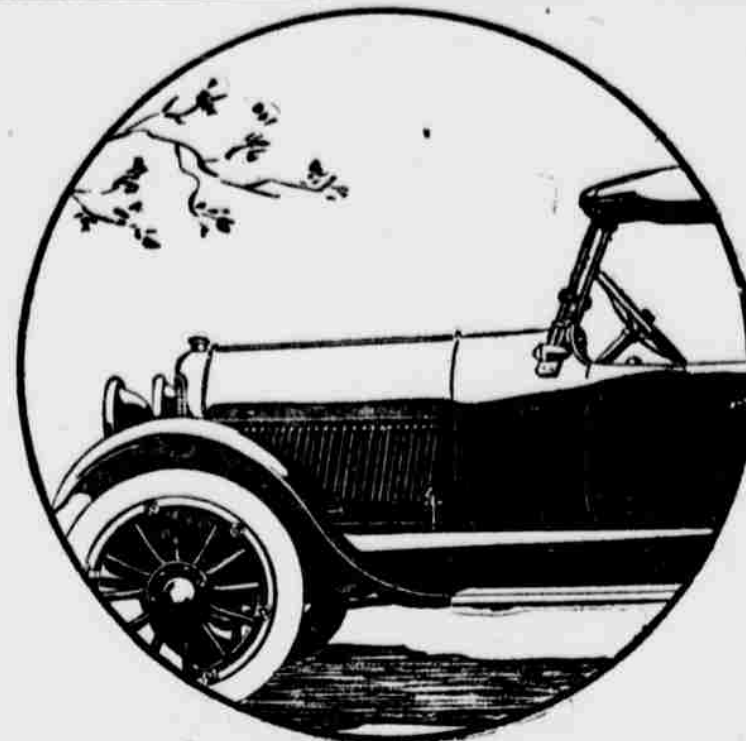
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